

## Alison McGrath

### *My First Steps*

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Alison McGrath's experiences of shoe shopping for her two young daughters in the West of Ireland frequently left her cold. Many stores she visited dealt largely in adult shoes with only a limited children's selection. Couple this with the disorderly presence of toddlers and the result was that she often felt uncomfortable and out of place.

The young mum responded in June 2022 by opening *My First Steps*, a child-centric shoe store based in Ennis, Co. Clare. The store, which has professional shoe fitters on staff and is stocked with a wide range of top brands in children's shoes, serves also as an information hub for parents to learn about good practices around children's footwear.

"Our role as retailer and advisor for customers has become more important since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic when a lot of specialised children's shoe shops closed across the country. A recent study found that, following the pandemic, 67% of children are wearing the wrong size footwear. That can have a profound effect on their lives and future," says Alison.

The success of the Ennis store provided the impetus for the opening of a second, flagship store in Galway city in May 2023. My First Steps now employs 10 people across its two outlets. In 2025, the business was crowned *Drapers Independent Shoe Retailer of the Year*, recognition of its growing reputation for expertise and innovation. Recent launches include an AI-powered online measuring tool to support accurate at-home fittings and Jump Club, a points-based loyalty programme that works seamlessly across all locations and channels.

Alison credits ACORNS for helping her analyse the performance of the business and stay accountable for growth goals. "The lessons and expert advice received during ACORNS helped us focus on the current business goals before pursuing our ultimate aim of making *My First Steps* the household name in the children's shoes retail market."

**Providing early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their current aspirations.**



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